DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 191 500 IR 008 762

AUTHOR Kitchens, James A.
TITLE The Combined School and Public Library in Olney, Texas.
PUB DATE Jun 80
NOTE 8p.: Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Library Association (New York, NY, June 29-July 5, 1980). For related documents, see ED 093 292 and ED 184 586.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Community Development: *Community Information Services: *Community Programs: Learning Resources Centers: *Library Cooperation: Library Facilities: Library Services: *Mergers: *Public Libraries: School Community Relationship: *School Libraries

ABSTRACT

The dedication in June 1979 of a newly constructed library facility in Olney, Texas, brought together the collections of the school and public libraries, which had been administered as a single unit with one board, library coordinator, and budget, since 1974. A study conducted to evaluate the coordinated library which existed from 1974 to 1979 examined the operation of the library both from the administrative point of view and on a day-to-day basis, problems which arose and their solutions, community attitudes toward the library, and the advantages and disadvantages of such library services. Some 60 persons responded to open-ended questions in hour-long interviews, including library personnel, teachers, students, community leaders, and community residents. Minutes of the various boards involved and all written documents relevant to the research were also examined. A discussion of the findings includes descriptions of the library operations being studied--i.e., the library board, funding, administration and budgeting, censorship, and new programs--as well as advantages of this approach to library service, and factors which were important to its success. (RAA)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED191500

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

THE COMBINED SCHOOL AND PUBLIC LIBRARY IN OLNEY, TEXAS

by

James A. Kitchens

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

James A. Kitchens

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

IR008762

THE COMBINED SCHOOL AND PUBLIC LIBRARY IN OLNEY, TEXAS

Olney, Texas is a town of 5,000 people in the North Central part of the state surrounded by rich farm lands and some oil fields. It is a neat, orderly small town supported by farming, ranching, and several small industries. Enormous civic pride and an unusual spirit of cooperation characterize the community and, unlike many small towns, Olney has managed to attract young families and to grow in population since the early 1960's. For the last decade, Olney has been the scene of a unique and innovative approach to library service.

Olney began its library experiment in 1971 when the idea of combining the school and public library began. Library service, at that point, was woefully inadequate and, in the name of improved quality of life, concerned citizens set about to upgrade this as well as numerous other areas of community services. Merging the libraries, it was reasoned, would offer the opportunity to have better libraries available, to reduce duplication of materials, and more efficiently expend shrinking tax dollars. With the aid of an Office of Education grant, under the auspices of North Texas State University, they began the task of tackling the legal, administration, social, and library problems associated with this unique type of library service. A single board was established, jointly appointed by the school board and city council, to administer the combined library and a single library coordinator was hired to oversee the operation of this library. Money to fund the library was contributed by the school system and the city council. From 1974 to 1979 Olney operated a single library, under a single administration, with a single budget which merged the functions of school and public library. All school and the public libraries were open to all citizens--preschool, students, and adults the year around. Collections were in separate locations awaiting the construction of a new

building which was dedicated in June of 1979. When the collections were merged in the new library building, Olney had realized her dream of a combined school and public community library which has now been in operation for over a year.

The purpose of the research with which this paper deals was to evaluate and describe the coordinated library which existed from 1974 to 1979. The research was again funded by a grant from The Office of Education made to NTSU. We were interested in the library service up to the merger of the collections in the new building, feeling that it was important to evaluate Olney's efforts during this transitional phase. Also we sought to gather baseline data which might be useful in evaluation of the library in the new building at some future date. Primarily we wanted to know how the library was run both administratively and in day-to-day operation, what problems arose and the extent to which and the manner in which these were resolved, to discover community attitudes toward this library, and to ascertain what, if any, advantages and disadvantages such a library might present.

To carry out our objectives we interviewed some sixty persons from the following groups: library personnel, teachers, students, community leaders, and community residents. Open ended questions were asked and interviews were approximately one hour in duration. We also examined minutes of the various boards involved and all written documents relevant to the research.

FINDINGS

The constitution, written in 1973, calls for an autonomous administration board to oversee the operation of the library. This board of nine members was to be appointed jointly by the city council and the school board. All questions related to the operation of the library were resolved by this board. It is an incorporated board and it is to this board that the library coordinator answers.

Funding for the library is a joint effort of the city and school system, with the school providing approximately 70 percent of the budget. A kind of fiscal division of labor has been worked out with the school system accepting responsibilities for some expenses and the city accepting responsibility for others. The school pays all salaries (which gives the library workers certain fringe benefits, such as insurance and retirement). In addition, the school is responsible for all maintenance, and provides two thirds of a travel and convention fund. The city, on the other hand, is responsible for building insurance, utilities, postage, copy machine service, and a full-time temporary summer position. Supplies, book purchases, and equipment expense are divided equally between the two.

No problems in administration or budgeting were discovered as both of these areas ran smoothly. The budget has increased dramatically since 1971. In that year, the city spent $2,519 on the public library and the school, excluding salaries, spent $4,411 on the school libraries. In 1978-79, the combined figure was $46,000, and in 1979-80, when the new building was opened, the budget figure was $72,600.

Censorship, considered to be a significant problem area during the planning phases of the project, has been no problem at all. Some twenty-five books, considered controversial, were placed on a special shelf and required written parental permission before a child could check them out. The staff has served at times to offer guidance to children in book selection and, as such, has exerted some limited informal censorship. No serious problem has arisen in this area.

New programs, such as children's story hour, library orientation, and publicity events were instituted which have resulted in vastly increased circulation statistics. The community became aware of the uniqueness of their

library and this fact has increased the symbolic value of the library and contributed to the positive response which the community has made to the library.

It is well to note that community leaders are aware that more money is being spent and that improved fiscal responsibility means more efficient spending of tax dollars, not less spending. They believe that the improved library service is well worth the money.

Among the most significant advantages which this approach to library service offers are the following:

1. A unified program which makes all materials in all libraries available to the total citizenry
2. Improved service and programs
3. Increased curriculum support
4. Considerable increase in holdings
5. Increased visibility
6. More efficient use of tax dollars
7. Reduced duplication of materials
8. Use of school facilities and materials during the summer months
9. A coordinated weeding program
10. Increased use of library services due to publicity and enthusiasm generated by the initiation of a new program

The only disadvantages of the program were associated with inconvenience of school patrons due to scattered collections and inconvenience to the library coordinator due to responsibilities in four locations. These problems were alleviated with the merging of the collections into the new building.

In summary, the conclusion of the research is that Olney's efforts to provide improved library service through a combined school and public library

were positive in results. What we are dealing with is a very successful community library. Further, the success of the venture appears to be dependent upon several factors, among which are the following:

1. Careful planning
2. Effective leadership
3. Slow methodical approach
4. Communications with community
5. Careful research
6. Fiscal soundness
7. Community cooperation
8. Demographic factors such as:
    a) High school campus
    b) Community size
    c) Community homogeneity

The final report for this research project is now being printed, and if you wish a more detailed picture of the Olney experiment, I will be glad to supply you with a copy of that report when it is finished. In the meantime, you may wish to look at the following publications:

Kitchens, James A. "Community/School Library: A Place for Reading and Renewal." The Texas Outlook 58 (December 1974):37-38.

_____. "Public Libraries and School Libraries--Is there a Better Way?" Texas Libraries 35 (Spring 1973):17-22.

_____. The Olney Venture: An Experiment in Coordination and Merger of School and Public Libraries, North Texas State University, 1975.

_____ and Joni Bodart. "Community Library Alive and well in Olney, Texas." Texas Libraries 41 (Winter 1979):162-166.

In addition, articles to be considered for publication have been submitted to Top of the News, School Library Journal, Library Journal, and Wilson Library Bulletin. You may wish to look for these over the next few months if you are interested.